

Rabindranath Tagore, India's Nobel laureate, once said that his "mantle had fallen on Harindranath." Tagore, of course, was referring to the famous poet Harindranath Chattopadhyaya.

Harindranath is a versatile person. The *Who's Who* describes Harindranath not only as a poet, but a dramatist, musician, and actor. He is also pioneer of modern Indian theatre and leader of the progressive movement in literature.

Born in 1898 in an educated, cultured, talented and affluent Bengali Brahmin family, Harindranath is one of the eight children of Dr. Aghorenath Chattopadhyaya, a well-known scientist and pioneer educationist, and a respected figure in the social circles of his time. Aghorenath was in the service of the Nizam and so lived mostly in Hyderabad, where young Harindranath spent his childhood in the company of his brothers and sisters. All the eight children of Aghorenath were extraordinary children. Gifted in different ways, each one of them was to make a distinctive contribution to the world. Sarojini Naidu was one of them and has been better known as the Nightingale of India, who made an indelible name for herself as a great poetess and politician.

Harindranath when young, had a very sharp mind, a quick grasp, and an extraordinary ability to play with words. With a natural gift to write verse, he published his first book of verse "The Feast of Youth" when he was only 19. The poems brought him praise from great poets and critics like Laurence Binyon, Alice Men-sell, the American poet Padrak Colum, the Japanese poet Yonui Noguchi, and many others. The sweetness of his words, the power of his thoughts, and the unique fusion of Indian and Western thought have a deep impact on the readers. He is a master of on-the-spot verse. Words just flow out of Harindranath's mouth to be formed into delightful verse.

Children's Poet

Harindranath Chattopadhyaya

S.P. CHATTERJEA



His poems have been greatly appreciated in India and abroad. His "Song of the Grasscutter" brought him fame in the USSR and in other East European countries. He became famous overnight when a portion of his poem "Virgins and Vineyards" was published. In 1971 he was invited to participate in the World Poets' Conference in Canada.

Harindranath's poems have greatly influenced the old and the young alike. If his poems have swayed his adult admirers, his verses for children have brought laughter and brightened the faces of his readers. No reader can help laughing when he reads about the curious queen's favourite pet—a talkative parrot who prattled and prattled the whole night

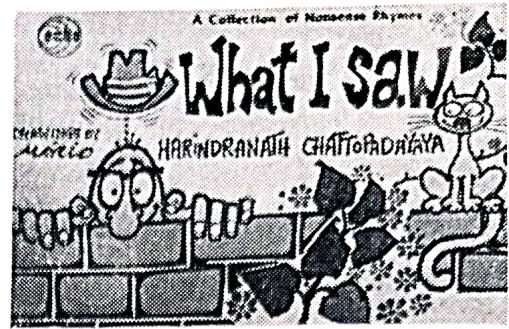
through, and during the day snored aloud in his cage, or the funny old king who had a black ape for a minister "resembling true royalty, feature and shape," or the painter "trying to draw the frown on the face of his mother-in-law," or the pilot "up in the air presenting a cloud with some underwear," or the smuggler who cleverly hides "watches and blades inside his inside" where they go with a clang and a tinkle!

When children read about the "Austrian giraffe that I hardly know to spell" and of the poet (Mario's accompanying drawings have provided them immortality) "trying to compose a lyric about an unborn rose" (the blank scroll in front vacantly says: To a rose), they feel inti-

mate with the poet, recalling their own adventures in spelling and fruitless attempts at versifying.

Harindranath's rib-tickling poems are meaningful and often carry a message to the reader. For example "to scold an old servant" is "thoroughly mean", "being lazy" can make a lad find himself "somewhat out of practice." The fox's wedding, is attended by guests (with gifts) like the hyena, lion, crocodile, giraffe, monkey, she-wolf, polar bear, the horse and the jackal. When a man who "teaches zoology" arrives with an "empty apology" as his gift, eyebrows are raised. Why has he come to attend the fox's feast "uninvited"? wondered the guests. "It is most ill-mannered, to say the least." But the fox has some wisdom to impart and he suggests: "Let us be friendly, let us be pleasant, let us be civil, and not make a fuss, since Man, after all, is a beast like us."

Though Harindranath's verses can "turn the usual human world topsyturvy," they are at the same time topical and relevant. The child reader will surely demand more of the parrot who tried "to teach a silly old cabbage to make a speech," or of the



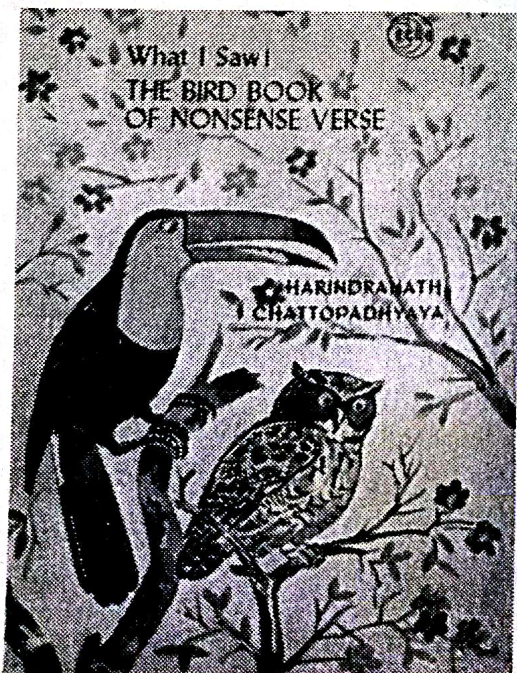
eagle who "cracks her egg like a bomb on a mountain's back," or of the chimpanzee who "cuts his birthday cake with both eyes shut." Carrying some subtle message his poems are delightful.

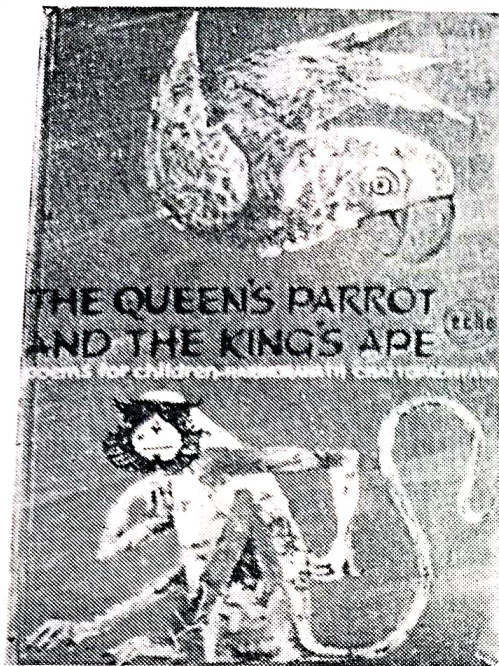
Harindranath has written nearly half-a-dozen books of verse for young children on every conceivable subject. These are small poems. Composed in simple words, their lines rhyme beautifully and children enjoy reciting them. He has written in English and Hindi languages and his works have also been translated into many other languages.

Meeting him face to face, I found his 84 years though sitting lightly on him, he recited his poems with ease, intensity, and the feeling of a young man. When he recited his popular Hindi poem "Rail gadi, rail gadi, chuk-chuk-chuk-chuk," I forgot his presence and was on a train with all its accompanying excitement. The intoxicating effect was such that I forgot my existence and got lost in the train excitement in his utterance. His words kept ringing my ears for hours to come. It was a memorable experience.

He is no doubt a consummate actor, dramatist, singer, and above all a poet.

Harindranath had his education in the U.K., Germany, the U.S.A. and the U.S.S.R. In the U.S.S.R. he studied theatre craft under the guidance of Stanislavsky and Meyerholdt. Chartering the course of what has come to be known as "modern theatre" in India, he has nearly ten plays to his credit. Abul Hasan, the famous character in his play, has its English verse





set to Hindustani tunes. Harindranath's contributions to the silver screen include a full-length film titled *Azadi* (Freedom) and the scenario of "The Legend of Gautam Buddha." An adept at histrionics, his occasional appearances in films have been applauded as cameos.

Harindranath Chattopadhyaya had also been a member of the Lok Sabha in 1952. The Government honoured him twice by

conferring upon him the titles of Padma Shri and Padma Bhushan. He has also been given the prestigious Dr. B.C. Roy Literary Award recently.

Walking in Nature's shoes Harindranath Chattopadhyaya says in "Bubbles and Eggs"—

"Nature draws us, one and all,
To her Entertainment Hall,
Where a thousand shapes perform
Time's delightful pantomime,
Clad in colours cool or warm,
Taking all of us by storm,
Every moment, every time."

Sarojini Naidu nicely says, "The makers of gold are the makers of verse."

(The author gratefully acknowledges Mrs. Lakshmi Bantwal's help.)

Published works of Harindranath Chattopadhyaya:

Children's Books:

1. What I saw: The Bird Book of Nonsense Verse
2. What I saw: The Human Book of Nonsense Verse

Poems:

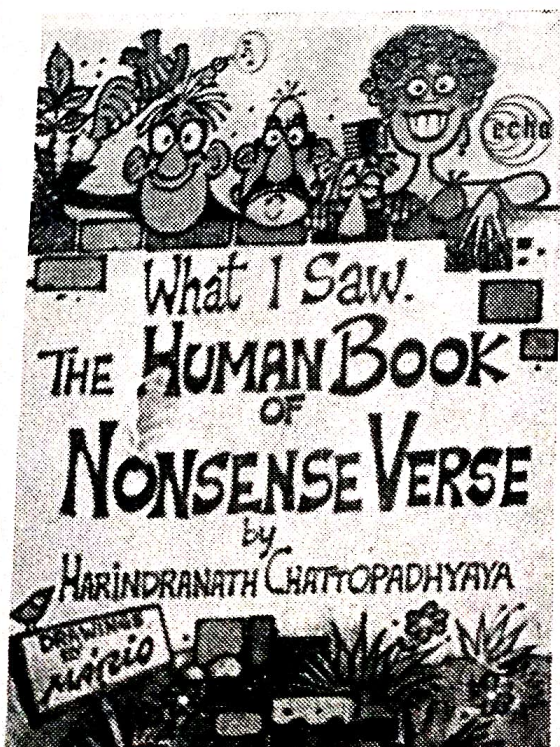
1. The Feast of Youth
2. A Children's Garden of Verses
3. Dark Clouds and White Showers
4. The Wizard's Mask
5. Winter in Spring
6. Perfume of Earth
7. The Divine Vagabond
8. A Treasury of Poems

Plays:

1. The Sleeper Awakened
2. Saku Bai
3. Pundalik
4. Damaji Pant
5. Tukaram
6. Jnanadev
7. Return from Abroad
8. Abubhasan (In this particular play English verse were set to tune in Hindustani music)

Autobiography:

1. My Life and I.



The Fox's Wedding



HARINDRANATH
CHATTOPADHYAYA

The cloud is shedding
Its rain in the sun,
For the Fox's wedding
Has just begun.

From forest and plain
And mountainside,
Guests bring gifts
For the Fox and his bride.

Here comes the first:
A grinning hyena.
Who brings a charming
Bowl from China.

Here comes the second:
A lion bold.
Whose gift is a mirror
Of African gold.

Here comes the third:
A crocodile,
Whose gift is a silver
Cup from the Nile.

Here comes the fourth:
A long-necked camel,
Whose gift is a casket
Of Indian enamel.

Here comes the fifth:
A monkey who writes,
His gift is a book,
The Arabian Nights.

Here comes the sixth:
A she-wolf vain.
Who brings for the bride
A scarf from Spain.

Here comes the seventh:
A polar bear,
Whose gift is a beautiful
Russian chair.

Here comes the eighth
To the Fox's marriage:
A horse who has brought him
A five-wheeled carriage.

Here comes the ninth:
A jackel who brings
The bride and the bridegroom
Two diamond rings.

Here comes the tenth
If you please, uninvited.
The guests at the wedding
Are getting excited.

He comes from somewhere
And teaches zoology.
What is his gift?
An empty apology.



But why has he come
To the Fox's feast?
It is most ill-mannered
To say the least.

The Fox then addressed
The guests who were present:
'Let us be friendly,
Let us be pleasant.
"Let us be civil
And not make a fuss
Since Man, after all,
Is a beast like us."

The guests, of a sudden,
Ceased to complain;
The clouds, of a sudden,
Forgot to rain.
The sun came out
Both gay and splendid....
The Fox's wedding
Was happily ended.

From *The Queen's Parrot and the King's Ape*.

REFLECTION

The progress of the book industry and strengthening of reading habit are we believe closely linked to the development of society.

Editorial—*Asia Pacific Book News*
Karachi, July 1982
Vol. XXIV, No. 3.

The Parent Committee of the Michigan Reading Association listed ten tips that may help you encourage your own child to read more.

1. I will read to my child daily.
2. I will help my child start a word collection of at least one unknown word daily.
3. I will listen to my child read daily.
4. I will take dictation (talk written down) of the stories, poems and sayings my child creates.
5. I will help my child pursue an interest and find the books to read on this topic.
6. I will praise my child for at least one success daily.
7. I will arrange for my child to use the library and visit bookstores or counters to select his own books.
8. I will help my child find a listener to read to (another child, grandparent, or a friend).
9. I will allow my child to buy books and educational games.
10. I will listen to my child daily about his school reading of stories and progress in learning to read.